

Beyond the Veil by xXxByersRosexXx

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Summary:

When Will was kidnapped by the Demogorgon in 1983, the Upside Down wasn't the only place he went to. He was torn between that and a world of fog with nothing except a girl. She wasn't anything special, just a ghost from a time long gone. Then why was Will drawn to her? Is she a friend, or just another monster?

Also formatting edits for Chapters 1 - 5, since I literally just found out how to do it :)

1. The Year

“Dance with me and pretend the world doesn’t exist.” She held out a hand.

After that, there was no going back but what else could Will lose? Terror would ease him into sleep and with each time he closed his eyes, he was in a different place. Sometimes it was dark, decaying, overgrown. Other times like right now, it felt like home but cold and foggy. The girl in front of him looked straight out of an old movie, only making him nervous. She wore clothes that he saw great-grandma wearing in a photo. How long would he be stuck here?

“I don’t think this is an actual world.” Slowly, Will took the girl’s hand.

She flashed a kind smile and tugged him to follow. She placed his left hand on her waist, grasping his right with a smirk.

“Of course it is silly. People can’t live without a world!”

There was no music but it did not hinder the girl Will happened upon. She started at a pace comfortable for him. It was odd, *weird* even, but he used it to think back. One moment, the monster in the bad place was chasing him. The adrenaline from running through the rotted woods hasn’t yet faded away. Then in a simple moment, he looked up and found this strange girl checking him over. In the middle of nowhere. Forcing him to dance. If he were younger, Will would be weirded out that a *girl* wanted to dance with *him* .

“Are you...real?” The croak in his voice earned him a kind gaze; the girl relaxed her arm and placed her hand upon Will’s cheek.

“You are *safe* . This world is *safe* .” She whispered. “So long as you are here, the other side cannot reach you.”

Will let his mind wander once he felt her lips on his forehead. It was instinctual, comforting, *motherly* . He couldn’t help but collapse his head upon the girl’s chest, feeling her warmth and chin overcome his being. Both of his arms clung to her; nails digging into her dress. His bloodshot eyes remained wide for he knew the consequence of closing them.

“I’m scared.” He whimpered.

“Don’t be. I’m here.”

“But then you *won’t* .” Will choked.

Tears welled and glossed over his green eyes. When they fell, they shine brightly against the dirt and grime from the bad place. Its evil earth marked poor Will in more ways he could not comprehend.

“Every time I’m here and I sleep, I wake up there. When I am there, I wake up here. Those things wanna kill me...”

The girl did not offer him words after his shaky statement. She was

quiet. Yet her hold on Will grew tighter. Since the beginning, she has lived in the world of fog, never wandering into the world of decay. Yet some windows open and she sees the terrible things that occur within. A living hell exists beyond her reach. One this boy she had met had lived over and over again.

“What is your name?”

“W-W-Will.”

“I cannot promise you this for when you sleep this night or the next,” the girl pulled back, looking down into his wet eyes, “but I will do everything I can to help you, Will. You do not belong in such an evil place.”

His features remained so sorrowful. Yet for once since that fateful night, he had hope. Will had hope. Whoever this girl was, her strange words soothed him a bit. She reminding him of his mother, who he knew was going crazy searching for him.

“What’s your name?”

~oOo~

“So Will, who’s Nora?”

Will had put on a gown, reminding him of that cold place, and had

weird little nodes taped to his forehead. No way were they as gentle as her kisses. His mom and Hopper silently looked between him and Dr. Owens. His little therapy session with all the wonders of the monster who tried to kill him and the world it came from. This day specifically he was reminded of the arcade; black clouds engulfing red lightning, the massive monster's silhouette once the clouds shined. He couldn't help but shudder. Yet when Will became more comfortable, he began to mention *her* every so often.

"The girl who saved me." His answer was nonchalant.

Given that he rarely spoke of her, Will heard the doctor scribbling on a notepad in his lap. That's

how it was in the beginning when he was told to be completely honest about his experience.

"You only wanted to hear about the monster. She isn't a monster."

"No, she isn't. A monster can't have a pretty name like Nora, can they?" Owens tried to lighten the mood. "Who was she?"

Will refused to answer. He glanced to his mother, her strained face faking a soft smile. The stress was too much for her. Hopper did not wear such a kind expression, but that was his face. Owens waited for a few moments for his patient to answer.

"Did this Nora live in the 'Upside Down'?"

“No,” Will blurted, “she lived in a different world. It was exactly like our home but grey and foggy.”

Owens jotted down the boy’s words but he did not prepare for a book-length response.

“She called it the Veil. It separates our world from all the others so we don’t get hurt. She said she didn’t know until she moved there because she used to live like the rest of us....”

Will went on about Nora; a floodgate had been opened by the mention of the girl he had met during his week of *absence* . It felt like years inside two tiny traps. Nora, all by herself, had made one her home. She invited Will to her home and made it his as well. He missed her.

“...She’s real. I looked her up in the library.”

“Of course she is.” Dr. Owens nodded. “You saw her, met with her. She’s as real as you and me.”

~oOo~

Will sat outside the doctor’s office. Both him, his mom, and Hopper discussed his mental state behind closed doors. But he liked being alone. Whether from everyone who now bullied him or to wander

around, he found it to be a hobby. Besides drawing of course. His mind, though, has episodes. He could blink and be back in the Upside Down. That he had no control over. Every day he lived in fear that he could blink again and not go home. But with this curse came a blessing. It took some practice and self-training but he finally got it down to an art.

Closing his eyes, Will began to breathe through his nostrils. He put effort in trying not to make an effort. In the beginning, it was hard. Sometimes all he would get was a bloody nose. But he had a choice whether to go back or not, motivating him further to return to the kind and lonely world. One breath in, a relaxed sigh out. Slowly he opened his eyes. Surrounded by soft grey, the dingy hall was akin to an open world flooded with natural light. No longer was it dark and aged. The closer the fog was, the more detail he could see as it spun an airy dance around him. A soft hand squeezed his shoulder.

“Nora...” He breathed.

The girl he had met over a year ago sat proper for someone of her background: straight, legs crossed. Yet her face was kind and Will felt love radiating from her. He knew he was safe when he was with her. The only difference is when he slept, he woke up in his own *normal* bed.

“Will! I thought you had forgotten about little ol’ me.”She giggled.

The two shared a tight hug, their expressions never faltering.

“My dear, how *are* you?”

He could tell Nora everything. Never did he hesitate or hold back anything like he did with everyone else. Will didn't think even his best friends could understand what he confided to Nora. Even if it was something as simple as school. It always started out like that: his normal life being the first to mention. His friends, school, AV club, his mom and Jonathan.

"I'm actually at the lab right now for one of my days." Will rambled on excitedly. "They were actually talking right when I left."

"Well how are they going? Does talking about it seem to help?"

Will looked down to his knees. He wasn't sure how to feel about therapy.

"I don't know. It makes everyone happy. And the scientists really want to help and understand everything. Some days I just don't want to talk about it. It's ...too much."

"You could always tell them no." Nora smiled. "You have that right."

Will felt at ease when Nora was with him. She knew how to comfort him and didn't treat him any different. His cheeks burned when she laughed and couldn't help but stare. She was pretty. Like, *really* pretty. He wouldn't know what to do without her. He loved the fact she wasn't always about niceties and being kind. Nora always asked him to answer the hard questions. Unlike Dr. Owens, he was ready to answer.

“Do you keep having episodes?” Will nodded.

Nora placed an arm around him, leaning both him and herself back against the wall.

“What do you see?”

He was so far away, yet the arcade monster’s stare froze him in place. It burrowed deep into his soul. It was unnatural. Fear. No matter what anyone did, the fear will always linger. Dewey eyes told the tale when the boy's voice could not. Even if Nora was no stranger, it was a look any person could recognize.

“Will, I have something to ask you.” Nora changed the subject.

He looked up and met her gaze. She swiveled in her seat and faced the boy fully. The girl's arms retracted but in that same moment, her hands cupped around Will's own.

“What are you going as for Halloween?”

His face lit up like christmas lights. Instead of rambling about his normal life, he went on about Ghostbusters and his character. One night a year, he and his friends can be who they are even if it’s nerdier than usual. Nora had absolutely no idea what he was talking about: the ghosts, the busting, Egon whatever that meant, but Will was excited to talk.

“From what I understand,” Nora began, “your time has better dental care. To which I say, eat all the candy you get your hands on! But be mindful, lest a stomach ache ruins your night.”

2. Trick or Treat

Halloween, 1984

“Did you agree to this?” Mike, showing his annoyed state, looked over to Will.

“What?” Will lowered the camera Bob lent him.

“To her,” the pillowcase swayed, “ joining our party.”

Finally, Halloween was here. The boys had opted to go as the Ghostbusters complete with proton packs. Dustin even went so far as to make a trap which turned out to be really cool. Yet some setbacks early this morning rocked them. Now Will and Mike trailed behind Dustin and Lucas because of a *girl* .

Max, her name was, had jumped out in some Michael Myers getup waving around a knife and everything. The superiority of nougats slipped away as each of the boys screamed. In reality, Lucas was squealing.

“It's just for Halloween.” The shorter boy shrugged.

It wasn't such a big deal. Really. Will didn't know why Mike was so hung up about it. It was the perfect night for trick-or-treating: dark, not chilly at all, even the breeze was low. Usually in Hawkins, the weather worked against them. Yet on this night, it was themselves.

“You should have checked with me.” Mike rolled his eyes.

“Well, they were excited. I guess I thought you'd be okay with it.”

“She's ruining the best night of the year.”

“What if it was Eleven?”

Will waited for Mike to answer. He got nothing. Finally, he stopped complaining and had retracted into his mind. In just a couple of steps, both boys had a lot on their mind.

Will had an earful from everyone about this strange girl *Eleven*, this girl who had powers. She saved them from the monster that abducted him. That was one of the many things Will was told about Eleven. Yet the unspoken truth was one that Will had already known.

“El was...different.”

“So's Max.”

“No.” Mike shook his head in frustration. “She's a stupid tomboy.”

“And Eleven has a buzzcut and powers. That's not really a fair comparison.”

“She's still ruining the best night of the year.”

Soon, it was only Will. Mike had sped up to think, leaving the

overencumbered boy by himself. Even a few strides behind, he was alone and followed his scattered group up the nearby driveway. 1590, Reagan and Bush '84, typical house. But before he could get his fifth full-sized candy bar, trouble was ahead.

“Watch it, Zombie Boy.” Some nasty high schooler popped out of nowhere.

“Trick or treat, freak!”

“Boo!”

The last guy sent him to the ground, slamming his proton pack on the cold asphalt.

~oOo~

Will had opened his eyes surrounded by a dark and terrible scene. The cul-de-sac of Loch Nora was no longer the affluent circle of the best houses in Hawkins. Exteriors worth thousands looked as if the long-awaited war ravaged them beyond repair. Vines claimed any surface it could reach, spores danced in the air like ash. The once full trees around the houses were as bare as winter.

“Mike!?” Will called out, his lonely voice echoing far and wide.
“Mike!?”

Something heard Will, something that called the Upside Down home. Chittering echoed off the decaying walls and cars. It sounded almost like skipping rocks across a pond. But this wasn't fun. No, it was

unnerving.

Ways away down the dead road, a large figure jutted up to the sky. The land beneath groaned with the shifting weight. Rumbling, growling, an ominous sigh followed as the being was swirling in the sky. The limbs itself twisted like black tornados. It spun until a shorter appendage faced Will. *The head* .

He felt its hidden eyes staring into his soul, burrowing darkness into his veins with a look. Will couldn't look away but his body turned and ran to the nearest house. He glanced back, only to see the being descend and close the gap between the two. Will jumped down the steps to the covered patio. He could do nothing but collapse and bring his knees to his chest. He couldn't help but breathe loudly and close his eyes; a natural way to ward off fear. But he heard smoke descend, feeling it caress his cheek. Will fought the urge to look, mumbling to himself, saying none of it was real. He swore he heard it say his name.

“Will!” A hand grabbed his shoulder, causing Will to scream and open his eyes.

There before him was Mike. Around him was warm light. The red brick house wasn't decayed or broken in any way. He looked around to see if he was back, wide-eyed with fear brimming in his eye.

“Will, what's wrong?” Mike knelt down. “I-I-I couldn't find you. Are you hurt?”

“Holy shit!” He heard Dustin coming down the steps.

“Is he okay?” Lucas caught his breath.

“I don't know. I'm gonna get you home, okay? I'm gonna get you home. Hold on.”

Mike helped him up, swinging his arms around him in comfort. One was tight around his chest and he pushed Will's shoulder into his own. Dustin wanted to help, stepping up and offering a hand but Mike waved him off.

“I got him.” His tone was forceful.

“Mike?”

“Keep trick-or-treating.” Will spun out of his tight hold, but was still under Mike's arm. “I'm bored anyways.”

The two boys took their time ascending the steps. Mainly to give Will the time he needed to breathe. Mike never looked back to the remaining three. He heard the annoying girl who ruined his night say: “What's wrong with him?”

Mike rolled his eyes. Soon, they were down the driveway back to the grounded sack and video recorder. Mike never said a word, picking up everything without giving anything to Will. He needed to walk, *to think*. He never saw him do anything like that before even hearing about the episodes. Mike was never a witness. But he knew something everyone else tried to play off as memories. That was definitely real. If Will can freak out like nothing, he's seeing something that would set it off. Mike had to get to the bottom of this. Not only for Will's sake, but for his own.

~oOo~

With their candy sprawled all over Mike's basement, the two boys let the couch sink them into the cushions. Mike was completely slouched over listening. Will, who sat straighter, began to explain something he's never told anyone.

"It's like like I'm stuck." Will sighs.

"Like, like, stuck in the Upside Down?"

"No."

Will held out his hands in front of him, extended and parallel. Mike noticed that he couldn't stop the violent shaking.

"You know on a View-Master, when it gets, like-"

"-Caught between two slides?"

"Yeah. Like that. Like one side's our world, and the other The other slide is the Upside Down."

Will paused for a moment, holding his own hands together. He couldn't stop staring at the candy. He couldn't face Mike with all this.

“And...And there was this noise coming from everywhere.” He recalled the chittering, the one that sounded like rocks skipping on a pond. “And then I saw something.”

“The Demogorgon?” Will shook his head.

“It was like this huge shadow in the sky. Only, it was alive. And it was coming for me.”

“Is this all real? Or is it like the doctors say, all in your head?” It definitely sounded real to Mike. No way would someone make it up.

“I don't know. Just...Just please don't tell the others, okay? They won't understand.”

Mike understood and nodded, silent as ever.

“Eleven would.” He confessed.

“She would?”

“Yeah. She always did.”

“Sometimes,” Mike began, “I feel like I still see her. Like she's still around, but she never is. I don't know. Sometimes I feel like I'm going crazy.”

He felt the frustration pull at his head, the feeling of loss tugging at his heart. He bit his lip, forcing his eyes to keep the tears at bay.

“Me, too.” Will softly affirmed.

“Hey, well, if we're both going crazy, then we'll go crazy together, right?”

“Yeah.” The smaller boy actually smiled. “Crazy together.”

When Will got home, he was tired. His mother was used to hesitant, vague responses from him and he used that method after walking in the door. Bob tried to crack some corny jokes and Will offered a tired but forced smile. He returned his camcorder before wishing the both of them a good night. He was also used to not eating and Joyce, in all her effort, gave up and let her son be. She was more than happy to whip him up something but she let it be.

His role as Egon was no more. Will stripped away the jumpsuit and the gear. He climbed into bed like nothing, not caring if he was almost naked. Sure, he'll be cold and regret it in the morning, but he was so tired. The constant state of having his fear eyes or crying took a toll on him, aging them exponentially. Yet he was good at tricking his mind. He felt tired because of Halloween. Walking around with his best friends as the Ghostbusters, hitting all the best houses, it was a good thing to fall asleep to. It was a good night, despite what Mike believed and the *other* thing. Will was content.

~oOo~

A peaceful fog surrounded the trees. It wasn't so bad on the inside but here and there it lingered. Nora waited in the Byers' kitchen reading a newspaper she found. In this world, she could do anything she wanted without affecting the otherside. It was almost like being a ghost and Nora was more than fine with being forgotten. She could enter homes and various places that had no ties with laws and such. She was the only resident and the only one who knew the Veil. It was almost like a complicated relationship. It was the real world but devoid of life and meaning. Yet the evidence was everywhere.

At the Byers', she could see Will had success in his Halloween endeavors. The pillowcase was left on the coffee table. She felt closer to him in his home. He was the only one who knew about her. She was *nearly* forgotten but that she was content with.

A bedroom door creaked followed by a loud yawn. Shuffling against the carpet, the closing of another door, the lavatory being put to *obvious* use. Someone was here. Most likely the living mingling with the so-called dead.

Nora was slow, making her way down the hall and stopped at the first door to her left. Her natural character remained polite and she knocked. A voice told her to hang on. The water poured from the faucet, splashing upon hands and basin until it squeaked shut. The door swung open, followed by a prepubescent scream.

“ *Ahh!* Nora! What the-!”

“Fancy seeing you here.” She couldn't help but laugh.

“That means.... *oh man* . I didn’t mean to wake up here.”

“You know, you’re almost a master. Accidents are bound to happen.”

A smile twisted on Will’s face, cocking his head.

“Is that a bathroom joke?”

“Oh heavens no! I’m far too proper for lavatory humor.”

Nora feigned her posh attitude, only making Will’s smile even wider. He saw the girl’s eyes dart down and then up, blinking rapidly before an even more impish smile consumed her.

“You should probably get dressed.” She suggested . “It appears you’re only wearing a single undergarment. Rather small one I should say...”

Will bolted for his room. He didn’t feel guilty pushing Nora to the side. Didn’t sound like she was offended either. No, she was laughing. *Howling* seemed more appropriate. He slammed the door shut and scrambled through his drawers.

“William! Tell me!” He heard her giggling through the door. “Is that the style for your time?”

He never answered. She continued to snicker. Will finally was dressed, wearing too much, but he was embarrassed. The door swung open and there was Nora, leaning against the frame with a smirk on her face.

“I know nothing of your time, William. Please enlighten me. For *educational* purposes.”

“It’s normal for boys who haven’t grown up yet.” He was exasperated. This girl was *exasperating* . “Even older dudes wear ‘em.”

It appears to the boy that he made her day. She simply couldn’t stop.

“I should, uh, probably go.” Will shuffled in his stance, kicking his foot and rubbing his arm.

Now Nora felt some sort of guilt. She placed her hands upon his cheeks, directing his gaze up towards her.

“I apologize. I did not mean to embarrass you.”

“We’re cool. It was a little funny.” Will nodded with a soft smile.

As with the end of all their meetings, Nora gave him a forehead kiss before hugging him tightly. She always found ways to be comforting

and a joy to be around. The only drawback was that she wasn't out there with everyone else. Maybe she could help him cope with his ordeal, since nothing seems to work. One day, Will hopes, one day.

Notes for the Chapter:

I do hope all of you are enjoying this! I have a good feeling about it :) I'm open to any commentary and it would be much appreciated!

3. Petit Point

November 1st, 1984

“Was that you I heard milling around last night, or was that a ghost?”

Bob was being his usual Bob self: a little too corny but harmless. Will’s mom sure seemed to like him a lot but he wasn’t used to such a blatant ‘Dad’ figure. He tries his best and Will appreciates that. He even offered to drive him to school with a smile on his face and everything.

“Yeah. Me, probably.”

“Another nightmare?”

“Um no.”

There was a brief silence. Bob was resilient though. Him and Jonathan always humored him since he was their mom’s boyfriend.

“Did I ever tell you about Mr. Baldo?”

“Mr. Baldo?” Will furrowed his brow at the ridiculous name.

“Yeah.” Bob kept smiling. “I was a little younger than you, standing

in line for the Ferris wheel at the Roane County fair and suddenly, I feel this fat white glove tap me on the shoulder. I spin around, and there he is.”

Mr. Baldo.

““ *Hey, kiddo, would you like a balloon ?*’ Go ahead, laugh. It’s funny. It wasn’t funny back then, I can tell you that. I couldn’t get him out of my head. Every night, he would come to me in my dreams. And every night when he came to me I ran. It got so bad that I made my mom stay in the room with me until I could fall asleep every night.”

“Really?” Bob nodded in confirmation.

“It went on like that for months. And then one day, the nightmares suddenly stopped. Wanna know how?

How?

“Well, I fell asleep and just like always, Mr. Baldo came to me. Only this time, I didn’t run. This time, I stood my ground. I just looked at Mr. Baldo in his stupid face, and I said, “ *Go away. Go away !*” Just like that, he was gone. Never saw him again. Easy-peasy, right?”

“Easy-peasy.”

~oOo~

Nora felt... *odd* . That in itself was strange. She could feel nothing but pity and love in her ghost-like being, but she felt it. Something was wrong. Nora was relaxing in a random home when the sensation overcame her, tending to her petit point. There wasn’t much to do in the lonely world. She tried to bring back hobbies from her former life while mixing it with new ideas. Crafts, writing, it all became a bore eventually. Yet embroidery never went out of style. Her sparkling

eyes glanced down to her handiwork: an ornate bouquet of roses.

Nora stitched into the fabric the energy she felt. Each thread was something specific, letting her mind take over and the sensation guide her hand. Yet she snapped out of the daze and into the foggy reality. Staring down, there was no vitality in her grasp. Only rotted and wilted roses formed a hauntingly beautiful piece. Nora knew then that something was terribly wrong. It was Will.

Immediately she got to her feet and began her lonely journey down the bustling paths of the otherside. Mainstreet. It has an equal age to Nora. Both were frozen in place as time went on. There should be families, friends, even lonesome souls. Yet there was no one except her. Only Nora dwelled in this world. That she had no true answer for.

Soon, the girl made her way into open land. The long grass waves in the fields making a sound like it's whispering. The hums of the other side infiltrating the breeze, murmurs that give Nora an insight. Most of the time, she is envious and eager to listen. Yet she has a worry pitted in her stomach. For the first time in a long time, she doesn't want to know what it's saying.

The middle school was a strange sight. Nora remembered a simple two-story brick building when she had color in her life. She hadn't been this way in a while since a ghastly white brick building now stood against her memory. Nora thought that it screamed in agony. Yet step by step, closer to open fields, it became all too real.

There was a black stain in the air. The eerie stillness took hold. Slowly, Nora began to sink into it as if it beckoned her. She felt like she was disappearing, like fading into darkness. Yet she couldn't turn

her heels and return to another random house. No, this mass *needed* her. She recalled her dead roses; the innocence consumed and spat out by the ugly. Then she remembered a name she whispered into each thread. *Will* .

She brought a willing hand to the mist and softly waved it around. She inched closer with each sway until her hand met the color. Nora did not pull back; not even a flinch escaped. It wasn't like an ordinary mist nor like any smoke. No, the girl's hand had passed through. The unsettled winds beyond her eyes licked her skin with the passing seconds her hand remained.

Nora pulled away and examined what should have been a milky white palm. Now coated with a chalky black, her skin was lined with an unknown wetness. She saw this before not even a year ago when she pulled a boy out of the same mist. *The Upside Down* she was informed in the following months, yet there had not been a truer name. It was opposite to the life and goodness the other side held. Despite this, Nora decided to continue. Her arm passed through with caution but her body passed through with ease. The mist gained a mind of its own and pulled the girl in. Dread soon appeared to weigh down petite shoulders and soul, opening virgin eyes to witness the new world coated with vines and decay.

“ *Will* !” Nora's heart stopped.

The boy stood akin to a statue, convulsing as pure darkness swirled around. Black clouds burrowed into him like a swarm of locusts. The toxic air was thick, hazy and dreary to the eye, grim to the heart, this world was. It paid no attention to her as she kicked her heels and ran with all her might. Even touching Will, the darkness paid no mind. It had the boy. It didn't care about her.

“Will! William! Will, please!” She pleaded with caresses and soft shakes, but he did not answer. Forcibly swallowing the beast, he *couldn't* .

His veins blackened, his already pale complexion became deathly. Nora's state-of-being danced between the living and dead and she could feel the life die as the darkness made room for itself. She was horrified. He seemed fine this morning, more than perfect with their jokes and his young face becoming happily flustered. She had to save him.

Nora leaned into Will, placing hands around his ear. Her fingers glowed as the light that would ward off the darkness, and surprisingly, the thick smoke released it's hold on that one place. The girl parted her lips, whispering words long dead to the world. They were soft but a great power was hidden behind the façade. And then Nora disappeared. The ghost girl beyond the Veil, *gone* .

~oOo~

Will's eyes shot open, staring into the worried faces of his mother and friends. His body was stiff but he could move; joints and bones finally unlocked. Yet his muscles throbbed, his pulse was electrified. Will could only breathe sharp breaths, not offering a single word. He couldn't. Something held him back.

~oOo~

The lights always flicker twice – once as a person passes them, and again just after. It put Joyce on edge. Flickering lights always sent her on edge now. Will couldn't tell her what had happened but she remembered what Dr. Owens said. So she wanted to comfort him.

“It came for me and I tried to make it go away. But it got me, Mom,” Will told her with a broken voice. “I felt it everywhere. I still feel it.”

No mother should *ever* hear their child utter those words. It struck her heart. The poor organ must be bruised and strained from all the aching she endured. But she was a strong woman. She survived Lonnie Byers and raised two amazing sons all on her own. Joyce put on a smile, albeit strained, but a face Will could respond to with ease.

“Why don't you go rest for a little bit, huh?” She brushed away his bangs.

“Yeah...I think I will...”

~oOo~

Will couldn't. It was so hard to try and relax himself. He couldn't be in the dark for the things within it stared back. He couldn't imagine the night sky, something so natural and serene and very beautiful, to be a pit of darkness that lingered behind the stars and distant planets. His mother wouldn't allow him to shut the door. He understood. He wouldn't want to be all alone in any case, but he needed a moment to be *weak* .

Waiting for his mother to stroll to the phone, he collapsed at the end of his bed and brought his knees to his chest. His arms tightly wrapped around until he felt pain and burrowed his face to hide the tears. He didn't know what was happening. *Why* is was happening to him. All this darkness and death still lingered in him, numbing him to the core. How was he supposed to grow up? To live his life? The pondering only made him weep harder.

“William, my dear...”

A hand wedged itself between Will's barrier, directing his head up. For the first time, he saw her in color. The sunlight filtered through the foggy glass and brightened her hair. It was not black like he imagined but a deep reddish-brown, glowing like a halo around her face. She was not pale as a ghost. Her aged dresses were not monotone. There was no fog or lack of living light to hide her true form. It was Nora. She was here with him. She was *out* .

“I'm sorry.” Her face twisted into an expression of sorrow. “I'm so sorry, William...”

Her fingers trembled, encapsulating Will in an embrace. Yet it was heavy. For the longest time, Will had leaned on her whether it was his choice or not. Now he felt the weight she bore on her spirits.

“What happened?” He could barely manage a whisper.

“I had to. I had to. I had to or else...”

Their natural form was for Nora to rest her chin on Will's head while his face was firmly pressed against her chest. Yet she sobbed so terribly; her chest heaved, her breasts shook, her breathing labored. She was more troubled than the boy and it worried him.

"Nora. What *happened* ?"

She sniffled and took a few moments to regain her composure.

"The darkness would've killed you, my dear. Something so innocent and pure as you would have been ravaged had I not helped..."

The long mirror next to his closet was in perfect view to the foot of the bed. Her glossy eyes nodded to the special glass and Will followed her gaze. He saw himself on the ground, face streaked with tears. But Nora was not. The mirror showed him something that went against what he was feeling. Her tight arms weren't reflected. He felt the weight of her head on his own, yet it was not there.

"You're here. You're here with me!"

Back and forth his head whipped but the mirror did not falter. Salty tears welled up in his eyes and he dug his nails deeper into Nora's dress.

"But you're here! You're not *there* anymore!" He harshly whispered, choking on his own whimpers.

Nora moved a hand to Will's chest, fingers softly pressing against it. She offered a smile tortured with pain. Yet it held some semblance of peace.

"I'm here now, *Will* ." She tapped his chest. "The darkness claimed you, but the light you now bear will prevail."

He watched as a single tear fell down her cheek. It was involuntary, a habit he had not known he possessed, but he reached up to swipe it away.

"You're in..."

"...yes." She sniffled, wiping her emotion on her sleeve before composing herself. "I am here to relieve the burden you now have. You must rest. I will tend to your affairs."

~oOo~

For the seventh time, Joyce hung up the phone. Rather, she slammed it causing it to ring out. Jim was supposed to answer. *Why* wasn't he picking up? She needed a break.

Her typical solution was the warmth and smoke of nicotine. The stick was between her lips, furiously trying to light it, but something caught her attention. Joyce went to Will's room with the door wide

open. Poor thing couldn't keep his eyes shut and she expected that. She also expected him hunched over the desk drawing something amazing. But he wasn't. Will sat up in bed, a collection of thread sprawled over his blankets. He held a tiny needle with his right hand as his left held a blank canvas. Joyce had to do a double take, a little turn of the head in fact.

"What are you doing, honey?" She cautiously asked Will.

He never looked up. Instead, he chose to continue this newfound hobby.

"Is that... *needlepoint* ?"

"...petit point...there's a difference..." Her son's voice was monotone. It didn't sound like him. Not at all.

Will the Wise: Dungeons and Dragons connoisseur, member of the AV club, an artist with the handy crayon, *needlepoint expert* . Or, petit point, but it still rocked Joyce to her core. How would he know that? How would anyone in Hawkins know such a thing unless they're elderly? It was an innocent little thing, but it wasn't *Will* . What happened on the field?

4. The Second William

Nora knew that if she looked in the face of evil, evil was going to look right back. And it did. The beast that had ripped Will's soul into shreds was merely steps away. It taunted her with a twisted smile beneath the smoke. But she was steadfast and stood her ground, her person a specter that fortified into a wall of light. She kept the truth from Will merely to protect him. Where the boy went, she would follow. And that meant *everywhere* .

“William, will you not bathe?”

Nora sat at the edge of the tub, watching the steam rise. Will stood at the door staring down into the pool. He was cold, awfully cold that even affected the girl. His mother took notice and was kind enough to draw a bath, but Will refused. He was in a daze.

“...it's...too....hot...”

“You haven't even felt the water, my dear.” Nora approached with a smile, outstretching her arms. “Come now.”

He didn't budge. Beads of sweat trickled down his neck, his eyes widening. Will never said a word; leaving as if nothing happened.

“I like it cold, insolent soul...”

"He likes it cold!" She heard Will snap, his mother frozen with disbelief.

Neither said a word. Without leaving the bathroom, Nora saw Will enter his room still under a spell. The windows were open in an instant and his flesh remained bare.

Nora blinked. Before her was the boy sitting so quietly on his bed. He was ever so still, so.... *lifeless* . She kneeled down, placing her hands on his knees and looked up to his dark eyes.

"Leave him alone." She harshly whispered.

Will glanced down without expression. There was a growl in his throat, a predator hidden within him.

" *He is mine.* " The beast used his innocence to speak, but Nora knew better.

She was unshaken, unbeaten, and wished to remain in such state. She was a proud young woman, as if her first life prepared her for the neverending tragedy of the second. The beast, so disconnected from the greater abomination, reminded her of the fickle humans from time long past.

"You will not win." She smirked. "Two is greater than one."

She stood proudly, but not before vanishing from the eyes of Will and the monster that torments them both.

~oOo~

Will furiously scribbled on the paper, reducing crayons into stumps with every five sheets tossed aside. He paid no attention to his mother or the police chief grabbing them and scurrying about the breezy house. He saw the vines twisting and spiraling, too large to contain on a single page. Yet he felt serene. Everything left him alone. *Everything* .

Nora simply laid on his bed, back pressed against the board while her legs were outstretched. The canvas she started early was firm in her grasp. She pricked the needle through the gaps with such speed that it was almost inhuman. She prided herself in her speed and skill. Years of nothing did wonders for her hand coordination, but it meant being stabbed continuously until she got it just right.

“What are you humming?” Will mumbled, but it caught Nora off guard.

She paused her work. He was still hunched over the desk scribbling but he was there. She didn’t even realize she was humming.

“Oh...I guess a protection of sorts.”

“It sounded old.” The boy’s reply was simple. “Older than

everything.”

“The darkness is ancient. Maybe we need something with age to help fight it.”

In the Veil with the grass blades that held secrets, the concept of time was a mere myth. Everything within the other side she now resided in was an open secret in the fog. The secrets of the ancients, the would-be mysteries of the future, everything settled like dust in that world.

“Will you...tell me?” Will himself paused for a moment, glancing to his bed.

Nora offered a soft smile and a weak nod.

“I am your beacon and protection. Even if that means evoking words and hymns even I cannot understand. The primordial is the most obscure piece of knowledge no mortal being knows.”

“He shows me things.”

Nora knew what Will meant. Sharing a mind with a boy and an arcane enemy does that. She seen hell on earth, the corruption of man, life ending as she knew it. She buried her nose back to her work

“Don’t think about it, William.”

“He *forces* me, Nora.”

~oOo~

“See?!” Joyce harshly whispered, pointing to her son.

Her and Jim stared and heard everything Will was saying, as if someone was there with him. Joyce even pointed out his gaze was to the bed and his drawings.

“I thought Nora was just some PTSD thing Owens mentioned.” Jim shook his head, but Joyce wasn’t having it.

“This is all real.” She breathed. “What if she is too?!”

“Owens said after he read about her in the library, he made her real in here.” Jim tapped his head. “Nora’s dead. She’s been missing since 1923.”

~oOo~

Will opted to ride his bike for a while. He was sick of his house, the drawings, longing for fresh air. His mother, understandably against the idea, tried to convince him otherwise. Yet he was having none of it. The cold November air blew his hair back with every pedal

clinging to the edge of the road. It was peaceful. Few people drove out to his area, making him completely alone.

“So...you’re dead?” Will started the conversation.

He could feel Nora clinging to his shoulders as he pedaled on, her body pressed tightly against his. She chuckled in his ear.

“Dead to the world. I’ve been trapped until now.”

“Makes sense.” Will nodded. “I looked you up in the library y’know.”

“I know.”

They didn’t need to say much more. Nora knew her own life. Will felt melancholy thinking about it. Silence overcame them. It was warm and friendly, assured that it was not strange.

“William?” Nora was quick to break the air.

Before he could reply, a rising growl echoed from the woods. It wasn’t an animal or monster of any kind. It grew louder, more powerful, softer screams followed the closer it got.

“You have been dying since the day you were born

You know it has all been planned

The quartet of deliverance rides

A sinner once a sinner twice

No need for confessions now

Cause now you have got the fight of your life”

Will and Nora even heard yet another voice added in, in sync with the music. Nora in particular had never heard such sounds before. It sounded unpleasantly loud, the noise being so unnecessary. She couldn't believe that this was *music* .

It was right up at their ears, blaring like sirens. Then the volume was lowered, leaving only the grumble of the engine. It was definitely a car: a deep, shiny blue.

“Hey! Kid!” The driver barked.

Will shuddered. He didn't need to look to see who it was.

“William?”

“It’s Billy Hargrove. He’s insane-”

“-I’ll deal with him. Just switch spots alright?”

~oOo~

“Hey shithead! You fucking deaf?”

Billy pulled up beside that spaz Byers, *the Boy Who Came Back to Life*, but that was just a fancy way he was crazy. It was a crock of shit, really. He knew he was correct when he saw him mumbling to himself, nodding and just being a freak. He still hasn’t looked him in the eye and that made Billy annoyed.

“ *Hey!* ”

“Hello.”

That was all the Byers kid said. So pleasant and nonchalant, it was weird. He didn’t even sound like a boy.

“Yeah, where’s Max?”

He watched the kid work what he said in his head as if he spoke Chinese.

“...Max...?”

“My sister? Max? I saw you with her and your freak friends. Don’t shit on me!”

“...I wouldn’t know. I didn’t attend school today.”

Billy snarled under his breath, slamming his hands against the steering wheel. His dad wasn’t going to like this. Then again, he didn’t have to go home. Billy could do whatever he wanted simply because he was Billy. He glanced out to see the kid still sitting on his bike, eyes running up and down his ride.

“Beat it, kid.”

He ignored him.

“What kind of automobile is this?” Billy squinted at the word.

He had to stare at the kid for a second to make sure he heard him right.

“My auto-? *My car* ?”

“Yes.” The kid nodded.

“Hmph, you’re fucking weird. No wonder Max hangs out with you.”

Billy was ready to rock on and speed out, but he heard something under the kid’s breath. If someone was going to talk shit, he believed they should be *man enough* to say it to their face. He made his fourth head turn.

“The fuck did you just say?”

Anyone else would just try to hide the fact that they’ve crossed his line; trying to play it off as if they were coughing or talking to themselves. Yet this freak, sitting so straight and *proper* , was unapologetic in his reply.

“You’re awfully rude.” He spoke loud and clear.

He was about to ride off before Billy lunged from his leather seats, stomping across the front of his car and got up-and-close with the kid.

“Tell me your name, *zombie boy* .” Billy taunted.

“William. Er-Will.”

“Listen, *William* , I don’t take shit from anybody, especially not from the town freak.”

Billy grabbed his collar, pull him closer and up towards him. He looked him dead in the eye, only to be met by something even more strange. The kid continued to wear a light smile.

“You are troubled, William.” The kid spoke with such serenity it made Billy feel nervous. “Why do you feel the need to cause such strife?”

He was ready to kick his teeth in, busting open the lips that still smiled. He doubted that the smile would disappear but Billy needed something to *break* . Letting go of the kid, he shoved a finger in his face.

“You’re gonna fucking regret that. And my name’s *Billy* .”

“There are so many derivatives for one name. You and I are the same.”

Billy had enough of the circus. Rolling his eyes, he stomped back and slammed the door. Will Byers, however, was not finished just yet.

“I still don’t know the type of *car* you drive.” He leaned in the open window, jumping back when the older boy sped off into the woods.

~oOo~

“Well he’s definitely a big timer, but he must be a dewdropper.”

“Nora, I have absolutely no idea what you’re saying.”

She giggled, resting a hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“This *Billy* who ought to bully you; he may be attractive, but he sure is worthless.”

They both made the decision to head back to the Byers’ household: Nora went on a tangent about slang and how Will would benefit from learning it. He agreed, on the condition that she would learn the current words.

“A good one is ‘the bomb’!” Will yelled over the pedalling. “You say it when you like something!”

“Like?!”

“Um...like Ghostbusters is the bomb!”

Nora nodded and prompted Will to continue.

“Embroidery is the bomb! Y’know, since that’s all you literally do.”
Both of them chuckled.

~oOo~

After dinner, Billy cleaned up his plate and made a beeline to his room where the smoke never airs out and the music never dies. However, both were on the small scale since everyone was home tonight. He made sure to snag Max’s skateboard before closing the door. He was set on having a word with her.

After a little while, the expected knock on the door. Lo and behold, *Maxine* .

“Where’s my board?” She demanded.

Billy could only sneer at that.

“Not even a hello?” She rolled her eyes, widening when her brother pulled out her prized possession.

He dangled it in front and pulled back every time she reached. Billy slammed it on the floor, hovering his boot over it.

“Who’s Will?”

“Will?”

“Uh, yeah? You deaf like him?”

“He’s just a classmate-”

“-like Lucas? Are they a bunch of freaks like him?”

“I don’t know what happened. All I know is that he went missing last year!”

Earlier, Billy saw her and that Lucas kid arguing. He knew she was telling him the truth; no boy would ever tell a girl the truth. But he didn’t like her tone or her greeting, so Billy slammed his heel into the board, forcing a massive crack to form. One was enough. Just riding it will break it completely. He kicked it across the threshold, closing the door to his sister’s whimpers.

Billy jumped into bed and lit a cigarette. That Will Byers was just... *weird* . What kind of kid talks like that? But he soon left that memory in the back of his head, focusing only on his cigarette and Blue Öyster Cult.

Notes for the Chapter:

So this is more of a filler, mainly focusing on Will and Nora, plus the arrival of another special character ;) I do hope everyone is enjoying it so far!

5. Civilized

How does one destroy a monster without becoming one? Nora retreated into the depths as soon as they set foot in the house. Even Will could not see her, but she was there ever watching and guarding the boy. The weight he once bore before had crashed down on his shoulders. The pit of despair growing in his stomach tightened. Two things were for certain: Will was frightened and it was too hot for him. With every strained pulse, horror poisoned his blood. With every second the air remained warm, his sweat was equal to that of an Olympic athlete's. Only Will could fight off this *virus* . Nora doubt he could sweat it out but it was beyond her reach.

In her own separate mind, she was the lady of the house once more. Not in the estate she was damned to in her original life but one she *deserved* . The wood was rotting, the grounds unkept, the mansion was untouched. *Condemned* , Nora later learned, and was fenced off from the world. Yet in her mind, it was as she remembered it. It was finally hers so long as she dwelled in imagination.

“Would you like something?”

“No, thank you. Perks of being primeval is never needing nurturing.”

So civil this being was portraying itself to be as it actively tormented Will. It played the game of a sixty-year-old dinner party. It even wore the form of a well-dressed human. Yet it was a being of pure evil, so Nora stared into the black eyes of a man she never wanted to see again.

“Neither one of us do.” Nora poured it some green liquid in two

glasses. “Yet since we’re playing *pretend*, indulge.”

Nora sauntered to the darkness and handed it the glass. Their nose crinkled without ever looking or inhaling the scent.

“And this is...?”

“Absinthe. It was banned during my lifetime but we’re here to have fun, aren’t we?”

Nora didn’t bother to stay and chat. Soon enough, she was across the table and took her place as the head. It was such an odd thing: Nora and the darkness. Not so much that they were stuck together. Mainly it was that even in her solitude, the being would invite itself and dress up as a human. So far, the torture was nonexistent. Yet she knew better than to assume that it would be a lovely party. She continued to mix thought with sight, observing the darkness take a sip of their drink.

“Enlighten me.” Nora pointed her nose high. “Who are you?”

“You know the answer.”

“In your own words then since you’re capable of thought.”

The darkness finished the strange drink given to them by the light incarnate. It knew it all: the drink, the terms, everything. It was more

interesting but in someone else's own words like she said. The being nodded.

“An angel to some, a demon to others.”

Nora snorted at the response. She shook her head with a dark chuckle, the jewels of her headband sparkling like stars.

“*Angel* ? For something so vile, you are humorous.”

Not to mention handsome. For a pathetic tendril of the greater host, it chose its face well. Despite all that had happened, Nora's former husband will always be so handsome. She wouldn't hesitate killing him again; to kill two dark birds with one stone.

“Now it is my turn *insolent mortal* . How are you protecting the boy?”

“A magician never reveals their secrets.”

“He should be dead and the body mine.” It gritted its teeth. “How are you doing it?”

Nora tilted her head. She grew more amused with this game. Both of them left Will to his own mind but they knew that the evil within still controlled his greatly. While Nora had to actively shield him, the darkness could indulge itself in ten make believe parties and not be bothered at the slightest. The atmosphere reflected the boy's state:

tense, full of fear, growing hotter by the minute.

“I’m told the power of love is a cliché.” The woman clasped her hands, rubbing them together. “Something in a fantasy that always makes it right.”

“Oh that won’t do. We both know everything you love dies horribly. I wouldn’t waste your energy.”

“My life has been of no worth. You know I’d die than to let you consume William.”

It was the darkness’ turn to for amusement. It chuckled and rose a brow.

“Rich coming from you. You liked to destroy like me. What happened?”

“I was in my own hell for sixty years. Changes people but you wouldn’t know. You’re not even a being with substance.”

Nora gracefully rose from her chair and returned from where the liquor was stored. She hovered for a moment before choosing the amber brandy.

“Plus, those whom I’ve destroyed rightfully deserved it.”

“You humans are pathetic creatures.” Its tone reeked of accusation. “You pledge allegiance to one only to murder them.”

Nora accidentally poured more than she liked. She froze at its last words, throwing herself in deep thought. Her former husband was an average man of wealth. She would have rather married Maxwell Herring despite him being a poor man, but Jay was acceptable. They had an arrangement and he was respectful. Until the summer of ‘22 that is.

“Jay was a stranger to all when he died. *You*,” Nora turned on her heel and pointed, “saw to that specifically.”

And the darkness proudly bared its teeth like it had been rewarded.

“I don’t believe anyone realizes how much of a pest you are.” Nora rolled her eyes, sauntering back to her chair.

It was more like the darkness ruined her life, caused all the death and misery and her interment within the Veil. But they already knew that.

“They believe a special little girl opened up a gateway. While that may be true, this small settlement has been touched by many other worlds. It’s so close to the Veil unlike many other places.”

Hawkins has always been special even before the founding. When she was a girl, Nora heard stories from her grandfather about the land that was special. It was sacred to the indians, yet the debate was whether by curse or blessing. Men like her grandfather cared not. Their only concern was expansion and profit.

“Like the humans who inhabit it, the barriers are weak. I will claim them and revel in *Rel’Vroth* .”

Like hell it will. Nora rose her glass of brandy. Her features wore the same smirk she had when she got to her knees and told it that her and Will will prevail. That two is greater than one.

“To my respected enemy,” she proclaimed, “ *Kun Fen Saab*. ”

Her long dead husband’s face fell, evolving into the piercing stare of anger. Before anything else could occur, There was a pain brewing. Nora felt it. The darkness felt it. Both had hands pressed to their stomachs. An unpleasant warmth ate at their insides. The woman held onto the table for support and took in slow breaths. Like the darkness and Will, this searing pain owned her. It dominated every thought, controlled every action. The entity at the other end sat still with eyes closed. It had more control over the sensation.

“What on *earth* are you doing?!” Nora screeched, but she was met with a shaking head.

“It’s not me, silly girl. It’s out *there* .”

The dining room began to vibrate: silver ringing in place, the crystals of the chandelier quickly swaying back and forth. An earthquake?

“If it’s William! You’re! Doing! It!” With each word, Nora brought palms down on the table, jumping to her feet at the final slap.

She remained hunched over progressing into a pain foreign to her, leaning on the table for support. But she could not keep her bearings and buckled over onto the wooden flooring. Her breathing labored and every breath was different: one was warm air from the dining room. The other was cold and sharp in her throat. Nora blinked rapidly. There was darkness, then the white ceiling with the chandelier. There was darkness again, then there was a blue starry night with bright lights at her side. She could hear screaming. It was guttural, animalistic. It was Will.

~oOo~

Billy needed to learn to live with the fact that sleeping will always be a nightmare, literally. He sat up from the sweat stained sheets with something dark still stirring in his heart. It wasn’t just the palpitation either. Dreams of a murky past still haunted him. His mind constantly replayed fragments of memories that he had forgotten. They were happy and made Billy chuckle. Of course it’d be easy to forget the happy times. Now he was just surrounded by shit.

Billy didn’t believe stars were an actual things when he was a little boy. Growing up in a city, the lights completely washed over the night sky. It was his dad who told him that as if he was always right. There was nothing Billy could say that could refute it. But his mom, the only woman he could ever love, reminded him that the stars were there and will always will be. They weren’t going anywhere anytime

soon even with all the lights.

“ The lights will eventually go away ,” he remembered her words, “ but the stars will always remain .”

Now he was stuck in Nowhere, Indiana with the night sky he never got to see. Billy only had to look up and out his window to see the wonders of the sky. It was mostly just a deep blue dotted with twinkling lights: some were blue, others were white or a faded yellow. He didn't even realize the stars were different from each other. He could even see a band of dark clouds cutting through the stars. It brought more colors like purple and green into the mix. Billy knew what it was. His mother, so excited he showed interest, told him the greatest thing he could ever see in the sky was our own galaxy.

“ When you see it, it'll look like a hazy fog. But it's special because we're actually seeing edges of our galaxy. It's a window into our own home .”

It was his own little reminder of his mom. The time zones, Billy refusing to come home until it was dark, it was hard to call her. He couldn't help but smile just a little bit. Maybe she wasn't a complete nutcase after all.

“What the fu-!”

Billy froze in bed; his body and sweat grew ice cold. There was screaming. Deep, rabid, it echoed probably throughout town. It sounded like a woman. Yet the longer it was drawn out, the more *demonic* it sounded. Over and over, whatever it was, it screamed

murder.

The door swung open and his father was on the other end. Whatever the noise was, it got everyone's attention. Neil loved Billy in his own way, but Billy knew he checked on Susan and Max first.

"You okay?"

"Yes sir." Billy nodded.

Without question, Billy jumped from bed and followed his father. They passed through the living room where he saw his step-family. In all honesty, Susan was perfect for the type of man Neil is. She's jumpy, constantly needed to be reassured and comforted, Billy knew without a doubt this fed into Neil's ego of control and power. She was rocking back and forth on the couch mumbling the same line of scripture.

"And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him."

Max could do nothing but sit next to her crazy mother. She didn't look too shaken up but that was normal for her. She wasn't a normal girl. First of, she preferred Max over Maxine. She skateboards, wears boy clothes, played arcade games. Hell, she went as fucking Michael Myers for Halloween. Neil the conservative didn't approve. Yet whenever he was in one of his bad spells, he would tell Billy he was less of a man than her. A *girl*.

"Here, son." Billy snapped out of it and looked down.

His father pulled some guns out of the closet and handed one to him.

“You stay with Susan and Maxine. I’ll be outside.” Neil brushed by his son without another word.

Billy didn’t like it. He hated Susan. He wouldn’t care if whatever was out there got her. He both hated and even liked Max, so he was a little okay ‘standing guard’ for her. No one said a word. Step-mother having a freakout on the couch, step-sister sitting next to step-mother. Billy was in charge of the mad hen house. What a life.

~oOo~

It wasn’t just Will screaming. There was Joyce, Mike, and Bob voicing their worry and concern for the boy. It was Joyce most of all, her sobs the product of her precious child howling in agony. The team at the lab rushed Will to an observation room but it wasn’t fast enough. Each piercing cry was a shard of her heart leaving her body. She tried to latch onto his squirming body but Dr. Owens and the nurses were in the way. They tried to assess the situation to the best of their expertise but there was nothing. Will continued to scream that he was burning, that it was everywhere, but there was nothing the nurses could find. All they could do is stick a needle in him and put him to sleep.

~oOo~

“William? William!?”

Nora sat on the side, trying to wake Will up. Her usual soft shakes were harsh and desperate, still trying to catch the breath that she was denied before. She was so stupid, meeting the demon that caused this instead of being with Will. She wanted to hit herself, call herself stupid and silly, but she needed to be there for Will.

“William! Honey! *Please...*”

“Nora....”

Tears welled up in her eyes. That little croak of life shook her to her bones. He didn't open his eyes. There was too much pain to even try. Nora inched closer, ever so delicately bringing Will into her arms. He was cradled into her sweet embrace, struggling to just breathe.

“...I can't.....I can't.....I....”

His soul was so beaten, so bruised, there was no way Will could continue on. He was pressed against Nora's chest, her chin on top of his head. She reminded herself not to squeeze him in comfort but to just barely hold him. The boy lifelessly lying against Nora, fighting to stay alive.

“William?”

“N-N-Nora....” He croaked.

“Switch with me.”

~oOo~

Mike was fast asleep in the chair beside the bed, leaving only Bob and Joyce to drink their coffee and speak with hushed voices. Yet even that was interrupted when out of the corner of their eyes, Will rose up in bed. Joyce rushed to his side but she couldn't make out any words.

“ *Nora....*”

“*...I can't.....I can't.....I....*”

“*N-N-Nora....*”

There was a brief pause, tense even. The weight of the world crushed Joyce as she held her breath.

“*O-okay....*”

Will slowly leaned back into the hospital bed, but he was quick to open his eyes.

“Mom?”

Bob ran out of the room in a heartbeat to fetch Dr. Owens. Mike, peacefully sleeping in an uncomfortable chair, sat straight up with alert eyes. Joyce smiled down to her son and rubbed his arm.

“Sweetie, how you feeling?” She whispered. “You okay?”

Bob joined them soon enough, telling Joyce the doctors were on their way. Will didn't seem to like that. Tired green eyes stared up to the man in wonder, trying to make out a face as if he'd never seen them before.

“Who is that?”

“Who?”

“It's me, big guy. It's Bob.” He added in a chuckle to make light of everything, but Will's face remained inquisitive. He even tried to reach down and touch Will's hand but the boy snatched it away. His eyes darted to Joyce like any scared child would to their mother.

“Are you a....doctor?” Will noticed the scrubs Bob was wearing.

“No. No, it's just me. Just...just Bob.”

~oOo~

“Do you know your name?”

“Will.”

“Your full name?”

“William Byers.”

“Do you know Do you know who I am?”

“A doctor.”

“Have we met before?”

“I don't remember.”

“You don't remember me? Okay.”

Dr. Owens had taped nodes on his head, shined bright lights directly into Will's eyes. A group of strangers crowded into the room, the only one he could truly recognize was his mother. The others, some seemed more familiar but were still nameless.

“How about, uh, how about this guy here?” Owens pointed to a boy around Will's age. “Know who that is? It's all right. Take your time.”

The boy at the end was awkwardly standing at the end of the bed, hands in a blue hoodie and his dark hair disheveled. He had a light smile and offered a weak wave. Will could only stare at him to try and make him out.

“That's my friend...Mike.”

Anyone who wasn't a doctor-looking type seemed relieved at the answer. The boy named Mike turned to Joyce and the stranger named Bob, all a little more at ease. But there was another stranger who began to speak.

"What about me, kid? You remember me?"

He was the tallest in the room. He had a beard and scrubs on. Will knew immediately that he didn't know this man one bit and shook his head.

"They tell me you helped save me last night. You remember that?"

"Do you remember anything about last night? About what happened?" Dr. Owens interjected.

"I remember they hurt me."

Memories of falling on a field screaming were jumbled with falling in a dining room. Back and forth, there was cold air and warm air, people trying to help and no one there except for darkness. He could see out of the corner of his eye Joyce growing uncomfortable. She hid her eyes behind her palm and turned to Bob.

"You mean the doctors?"

"No. The soldiers."

"The soldiers hurt you?"

“They shouldn't have done that. It upset him.” Will’s voice grew dark. His mother’s face was in a full state of panic.

“You say, “Upset him.” Is that him?”

Owens slid a photo into Will’s hand. A picture of a drawing, a spider-like being beneath swarming clouds. Will didn’t remember creating this piece. Yet he knew deep down it was his work, his vision in reality. He nodded.

“Okay. Okay, I wanna try something. It's gonna seem a little odd at first, but I think it's really gonna help us understand what's going on. Is that okay?”

“Okay.”

A soldier wheeled in an open glass crate. He handed it off to a doctor and shut the door. No doubt they were guarding it.

“Now, Will, I want you to just let us know if you feel anything.”

The other doctor lit a torch and barely hovered it above something Will couldn’t see. He could hear it shriek. He felt what it felt. But he couldn’t see it.

“Do you feel anything?”

“Little sting.” Will tightened his muscles.

“It stings? Where?”

His hands were immediately on his chest and dug his nails in. Owens

knew the answer before Will could stammer it out.

The flame soon lowered to be closer to the creature inside, its shrieks evolving into unearthly howls. Will kept telling them it burned. The flame remained, however, causing more pain to rush through his body. The heart monitor's beeping was erratic. His groans mixed with the creatures sent panic between Joyce and the tall stranger, trying to stop the doctors. They were just as bad as the soldiers.

“Stop it! You’re hurting William!” The boy himself cried out. “You’re hurting *us* !”

6. The Oracle Part One, Billy

Notes for the Chapter:

A/N: Yo so first thing's first. Shout out to my homies theblythe, Periantari, and Freepeople for the comments. I'm touched you're having a blast reading this, and that goes out to all the readers! You guys are amazing and keep me focused with with piece with all your views and kudos. So thanks for all your hard work reading and enjoying ;)

November 6th, 1984

Billy Hargrove had a shitty couple of days. His life was complete shit to begin with, but this time it was more so. It started when King Steve Harrington tried to beat his ass. Then Max got him with a syringe and nearly bashed his dick into the floor. But that wasn't even the worst of it.

"When you're ready son, go ahead." He heard the police chief beckon him.

He didn't think he'd be back at the Byers house any time soon, especially with everyone crowded into the living room. Billy couldn't bear to look up at them. He couldn't tell his story. His elbows dug into his thighs, his large hands hiding his face. He was...*ashamed*.

"Alright," he sighed, wiping his cheeks. "Alright. It started three days ago..."

~oOo~

November 3rd, 1984

“I woke up to hear knocking on glass. At first, I thought it was from the window until I heard it come from the mirror again.”

Once again, Billy was stolen from precious sleep. It didn't come easy to him with all the nicotine and occasional coke in his body. At best, he got five hours a night. He either snuck out or stayed in his room. Even with the latter, it was back-and-forth from smoking and jacking off. Yet like the night before, he randomly woke up. He almost expected to hear screaming again. That was not to be on this night. Instead, there were the soft taps.

At first, he looked over to the window where his maternal stars twinkled in the sky. Nothing was there; no person nor no rock being thrown against the glass. He ran his fingers through his tangled hair and sighed heavily.

Tap...

Tap....

Tap...

It was coming from across the room right in front of his bed. However, Billy had only one window in his bedroom and it was directly on his right.

“What the fuck...”

Slowly sliding out of bed with nothing but his bare body, Billy crept closer to the opposite end with only the moonlight to guide him.

Tap...

Tap...

Tap...

He looked straight forward: *the mirror*.

~oOo~

“I looked in the mirror and I saw something I couldn’t understand. It was like I was seeing it, but it wasn’t me.”

Nora stared into space no longer void of life for a man occupied it. Somehow she was transported to an entirely new place. One minute, the woman was at one side of Will’s hospital bed, screaming and sending threats to the embodied darkness across from her. Then with a few blinks, Nora found herself in a black room with a single swaying light. There were many distinguishable features: a bed, a mirror, but it mattered not. Before this strange revelation, she softly tapped the mirror for her reflection would not show itself. Instead, the reflection of the room was something able to harbor a life. The man before her leaned forward with a hunch in his spine, small static cries whimpering past lips, full of pained moans gasping and wincing. It was faint, yet loud enough to raise concern. Nora herself remained silent. Something was odd about the man who stood weeping. The cries were his, yes, but Nora found it peculiar. She was somewhere, somewhere that felt awfully like the land of decay. Life had never been revealed in such a place until now. This hazy realm bore many secrets with impossible feat. Nora knew some but there was always a new revelation awaiting her.

Quietly, Nora placed foot upon rotted ground, vines and twigs snapping with her weight shifting. So still that he wobbled, the man froze. He slowly turned his body, the popping of joints and cracking of bones accompanying him. Nora took another step.

Each time she blinked came with a jerky movement from the man. The cracks and pops heard when she saw only darkness and when eyes opened to see the decay, the man was in a new position. His face was now visible, the only source of color in this forsaken world. Eyes and sockets were sunken in with death. Skin paled appearing the

lightest shade of milky white. The left eye did not mirror its twin and the man witnessed the fresh ooze from violent wound, bone and muscle crushed into one gory mass. Teeth grey with decay, he grit them as if smiling for eternity. Nora's eyes trailed down to see toxic green and coagulated red lining from chin that dropped onto chest. His cries intensified without altering features.

Something in the woman wanted to offer aid as well as abandonment. Her natural nurturing tendencies hesitated to kick in, but nevertheless, did. Her time tending to Will made her heart swell and open to help. However, this was an entirely different situation. Logic told Nora that great harm had visited this man's person. The most primal instinct however screamed with fear and pure terror. Logic won contest, however, and Nora moved closer to help. No living being should be subject to the decayed world's torture.

One...

Two...

Three...

Four...

The fifth step was one that crossed boundaries. The man's corpse-like body lunged at Nora, swaying back and forth like a puppet free from its strings. A low growl escaped that rose when he grabbed her with the only arm still unbent and unbroken. He tossed her across the room and Nora's chin felt the slivers of dead wood below sliding in.

The man's body cracked furiously as he crawled towards her. Fear over encumbered her shoulders allowing the attacker to tighten grip once more, hoisting Nora up by yanking chunks of hair from scalp. Both pairs of feet were parallel to the floor now. The living woman, face-to-face with the dead man, saw only the face of death.

Slops and licks of blood and organs, never before seen the light of day, entered the world as a newborn pouring from body as the smacks grew louder. An unimaginable pain followed the sound. Nora

glanced down. The man's seemingly broken hand was past her torso, sharp fingers molesting insides. He yanked out and more blood and organ fell onto the ground now forever stained. His hand squeezing Nora's throat widened to cover neck, choking and tightening. Her head throbbed, her vision began to fade. Memories new and old replayed over and over. It comforted her. It angered her. But it shed needed light on the identity of the attacker.

The scene had changed from nothing into a well-decorated room. Beautiful wood and art surrounded them, gold lined the surface, the pathetic light above had become a grand chandelier. Even the dead man took on the appearance of a living being: his wispy hair was full and deep in color, dead eyes returning to its former brown glory, teeth dazzled like pearls, his skin was once again kissed by the sun and glowed beneath the crystal lights. Instead of his hand, it was a knife twisting into her stomach. She knew this man, met him recently even. But there was a difference the darkness could not mimic. Nora noticed it during the dinner party, the lack of a ring on its finger. But the supposed dead man attempting an other-worldly murder, he had the ring; far more golden than his flesh, it claimed his left hand which in turn claimed him in whole. Nora then remembered entirely. Her husband. Poor Jay, so twisted by the darkness. Her memory was fading rapidly but something she hadn't know became illuminated. This was their last final interaction before the Veil claimed her. She knew what such a thing meant. Her skin pimpled with icy fear but a smile forced its way out.

~oOo~

"I heard it like it was fucking ghosts or some shit. But that wasn't it." Billy looked up from his boots, pointing to the restored Will. "I started seeing shit you saw too."

The darkness seeded in his veins preserved him and kept his body intact. Will, however, could not latch on much longer, as the seeds

begin to attack his spirit: an intruder to the delicate system. For some reason, bits and pieces of visions came to him, his mind slowly being flushed away into something not grounded in reality. Then it was dark.

Not pitch black, but a dark green swirling and bubbling that stung his eyes. Then the sounds flooding his ears: waves rolling and crashing against each other. Will's throat tightened on instinct to preserve air. The smell was pleasant enough. A blend of musk and smoked wood entered his nostrils somehow. But he felt himself rising, the waters around him becoming greener, the scent transforming into a stench. Will broke the surface, cold air slapping her cheeks as pure decay cozied up to her being. Water poured onto his eyes and out his ears but his senses were still numb. With every few moments of clear vision, he took it all in. Will was alone floating in some sort of pool. There were vines and sludge lining every surface imaginable. Little spores floated in the air.

“Here now...I got you...” A voice whispered..

Will hadn't floated. Instead, a force dragged him out. He could feel countless eyes watching his every move. It even felt like they could see past his appearance, gazing upon the true Will Byers.

Soon enough, the boy violently coughed up the sludge he was submerged in. Keeling over, knees twisting into the mess of vines below, Will coughed and heaved until no more could be expelled. He felt sick to his stomach and was ready to vomit. But his quivering breath would not allow it. In and out, Will slowly composed himself. No longer did he lie in the hospital bed thrashing about and screaming to his loved ones. It was the Shadow Monster who called Mike a liar and whose piercing words somehow drowned out the alarms. For once, he didn't feel numb. He could feel sensations pulse within him, his flesh being tickled by the cold air. The cold. Will had nearly forgotten what such a thing felt like. He's lived north all of his short life and hated the cold. The snow, the ice, everything was downhill for him after the summer season. Yet in this grim november, he was thankful that he was freezing.

“H-hello?” Will softly called out, hoping the person who helped him remained.

He could hear haunting whispers slowly echo throughout the area. An ominous wind. A ringing church bell. *Groaning. It was all too much but Will remained still. He was too afraid to move. Too alone. Who helped him?*

~oOo~

“It’s like there was no time. One minute, he’s out in the open. The next, he’s in a lighthouse or some shit. It was fucking weird.”

Darkness crashed down onto the world transforming the serene waters into a black and violent mass of power. Daggers of cold rain pierced the sea and rocks forming a tiny island glistened against the flame lining the path from dock to door. In several moments, Will found himself out of the water but instead in sharp rain. The boy stood there not knowing what to do. But there was another. A man, shrouded by night and secrets, set foot upon the aged dock. It creaked with each step until he met slabs of rock that in turn resulted in deep thuds. He didn’t seem to mind Will. Then again, Will perhaps was likened to a spirit in comparison.

The man stole a glance of the city so far behind him and quickly disappearing with rolling fog. A beam of light spun in circles above his head, around the island in whole, and attention was now placed in such a mystery. His eyes darted up to find a balcony only illuminated when the spinning light shone upon it.

The man continued on, finding barrier disguised as a door, with the boy following him closely. A note was stabbed into the wet wood.

The paper had been long soggy, ink bled like black tears but remained somewhat legible. The note told the man of welcomed arrival and warm greetings although the reception was cold. The man reached for the note but his touch forced the door to slowly open. A void reigned supreme within. Only the wet flames shed golden path and he entered not before taking flame into grasp. The door shut behind and the torch revealed a clearer picture untainted by the stormy lights.

The man left in search of those who beckoned him to come, leaving the bewildered Will all alone at the entrance. Nothing but lonely tools and the smell of pungent sea coated the inside as Will waltzed around. The man soon began to ascend the stairs spiraling upwards. Halfway up, he paused. Will knew with the lack of steps and the steady light. The man continued his steps. Except he was descending.

He inched closer to Will, brows furrowing as his eyes tried to understand. No amount of squinting could ever answer the strange sight before him. Will, on the other end, hadn't moved a muscle. The man was right in front of him waving his torch up and down.

"Boy," the man was assertive, "why do you trail behind me like a spirit?"

"You can see me?" Will was in shock.

"Why would I not?"

It was most peculiar indeed.

"What is your name?" The man asked but Will offered him nothing.

He was quick to drop onto a knee, gazing into the boy's eyes directly.

“This is no place for a child. I must see to it you are well-cared for.”

He couldn't help but notice he spoke in a funny way; like Nora even. Obviously this wasn't real and Will needed a figure to protect him. He liked Nora far more than this man, but perhaps a long-awaited male figure was what he really needed in his life. But why did he look like Billy Hargrove of all people?

“Will.” He sputtered out. “My name's Will.”

The man offered a little smile and his large hand.

“And I'm Maxwell.” They both shook hands.

“Well, Maxwell, why are you even here?”

“Darkness has engulfed my town. The mistress of the house sent me here to find something to help.” He was oddly very open, only adding to his similarities to Nora. “And you?”

“It got me.”

Maxwell did not inquire any further. His hardships at home were terrible; he couldn't begin to imagine what this boy was going through. Both man and child ascended the steps together and stumbled upon a floor lit by a single candle. The torch in hand helped the man make sense of the dishevelment around. Things were strewn about. A warmth clung to the air, growing in sensation as Maxwell first crept closer to it. An old rusted stove, yet still of use. The feeling of comfort radiated from within but found only the crackling embers of time past. Another crack filled their ears but shot more violently with each strike of lightning and a clap of thunder. He and Will pressed on, undeterred by the storm.

Surprisingly, a third floor held signs of life. A bed, unmade, was pushed against a wall sitting beneath a window. Clothing mimicked the mess of debris downstairs. The man found one of his own peacefully sitting peacefully in a chair. He moved towards the person but found the scene more gruesome than relaxing. Slumped back, sack over head, blood seeped into clothing and a note stabbed into the body. They were not bound, but the torch shone light over the mess lining the tower. A pitter-patter of scarlet and black escaped the body onto the floorboards. Maxwell didn't even read the note, too stained to make meaning, and retreated. Will was just trailing the stairs and almost joined the man on the floor, but he was immediately stopped.

“Do not come any further, Will. It appears our enemy was here first.”

A chill scaled his spine, but the man did not shiver. Wind howled outside the metallic walls as the rain pelted both metal and glass. The storm raging beyond their shelter was a thick veil of night and blinding light as one. Will averted his gaze, choosing to scurry over to one of the fogged windows. His eyes fell to the earth below; dock and boat remained the same, rocks more like matte silhouettes. The torches lining the dock revealed an anomaly, a natural glisten emitting from the strange specter.

“Maxwell.” His voice was numb.

The man joined his side and saw what Will saw. A beautiful yet haunting mirror floating before the lighthouse, softly waving like a pond attempting tranquility. Yet it did not parallel the black sea and hidden horizon.

“That must be the way out.”

“Way out? That obviously goes to the Upside Down!”

“What on earth are you talking about?” The man was not amused.

“The decayed world, the bad world, whatever the hell Nora calls it: it’s the Upside Down!”

Only the storm filled the silence between them. Maxwell’s hard face seemed to have fallen, eyes widening and his brows arching.

“Nora? *Nora Lancaster?*”

Now it was Will’s turn for his face to twist.

“The only Nora I know is Delongpré.”

“That’s her maiden name.” Maxwell slowly stated. “How the hell do you know here?”

That was definitely a Billy moment, but Will looked beyond that.

“She saved me in the Veil. She’s been stuck there for sixty years!”

Will knew that Maxwell, especially if it was the Maxwell he read about, should know plenty about this. Both him and the boy were stuck in a world connected to the Upside Down. It was not the Veil, for this world bore storms and strife, but it was nevertheless abnormal. Maxwell, however, was even more confused.

“The only thing she’s been trapped in is that pathetic marriage of hers. You best not be making up stories, boy.”

How could he not know that?

“Are you a time traveler?” The man quipped expecting nothing, but the look on the boy’s face told him all he needed to know.

“Wait, you’re not serious are you?”

“What year is it for you...” Will signed, gazing to Maxwell with empty eyes.

“Nineteen....nineteen-twenty-three.”

“Nineteen eighty-four.” Will could only muster a sorrowful smile.

~oOo~

“So wait, you met a guy who looked like Billy...but knew Nora?” Lucas, like the rest of the group, tried to make sense of things.

“Yeah. It was weird.”

“Time works differently in other places. Each world is special.”

It was Nora who spoke up, sitting beside her older William and nodded to the younger.

“Whereas I had sent him there during my time, William was transported there in his own.”

“Well, did he find what you needed back then?”

“Obviously not, since I’m eighty-seven and still young.”

“See, I told you! I told you and you didn’t listen!”

Opening virgin eyes, both Will and Maxwell witnessed the new world coated with vines and decaying palettes. They had crossed over and Will triumphed in his prediction. He would rather have Maxwell’s vision of a better world beyond the ghostly mirror, but something childish came over him. Black and scarlet clouds rolled in the heavens as bloody waves crashed into the rocks. The lightning only illuminated the crimson within the cloud and the air was thick. Maxwell gazed upon his hand only to find it entirely coated with slime and sludge. The other held his torch, now bearing black flame. It was hazy and dreary to the eye, grim to the heart. Now he knew what the boy was saying. He claimed Nora had been here and in other realms, but he could not believe it. He served her faithfully everyday. He would know if she were gone.

Will turned his heel and saw only the tower. No silver pool popped before his eyes, now realizing the specter had abandoned him in a place of terror and death. Yet to what cause? Something was opening these portals.

“Goddamnit.” Maxwell growled, tightening heartstrings and pounding waves of thrustful pulses sent shockwaves through his body.

But then he realized something. The Nora and Jay he knew were mindful of the dark world. The Nora this Will child knew seemed to be an even greater expert, but the man he served had already been acquainted.

He remembered the day vividly: digging a hole in the garden. The exact reason was lost to memory but Maxwell dug for a purpose. Soon enough, he hit thick vines and spores exploded into the air. Nora wanted to go in and explore, claiming she could see a whole

new world in the hole. Maxwell only saw the dirt and vines. Jay ultimately went in, forbidding his bride to cross over, but he emerged changed. For the worst, he might add. Now he was here and could feel the evil weighing down his shoulders. Nora sent him here for a reason. *This world might have it.*

“Come along.” He waved to Will. “We go back in.”

“What? No! That’s stupid! We have to hide.”

“From...?”

“The Shadow Monster!”

Maxwell rolled his eyes.

“Then we hide in the lighthouse!” He humored him, stomping up without a word.

He ventured towards the tower noticing something was amiss. This tower was not the one he knew, it was now rusted with bloody rain and faced the opposite direction. The path of half dock and slabs were flipped, what he knew to be right now curving towards the left and entrance once facing the northern sea now saw the south eternally. The man glanced up to the light perched upon tower's peak. It, too, shone a red beacon and spun in opposite, reversing revelations. Not to mention the vines and sludge.

The door did not have a soaking note stabbed with a knife in rotting wood that spoke of warm welcomes. Within, candles and light were also missing, yet Maxwell could see as if he was in a hazy dream. He climbed the stairs that began from the left rather than the right, finding the first floor oddly out of place. There was no dishevelment,

only the cabinets and counters lining the metal walls held clutter. But the man heard a cry, static and full of pained moans gasping and wincing. It was faint, yet loud enough to raise concern.

The second floor was cleaner, hosting a full-fledged fire in the stove him and Will found embers in. The bed was still there beneath the window and recently used much to his memory's relief. His logical self knew someone must have made home of the tower but loneliness proved otherwise. The cries had gained better voice but the owner remained in shadows, it was so entrancing that the man failed to notice the rain had ceased, replaced by soft shots and claps of nature.

Upon reaching the third floor, Maxwell's heartstrings had contracted with force causing pain beneath breast. Nothing caught eye; not a body, not the mess of debris and blood. It was clean. Only the now empty chair remained souring his soul. Perhaps more frightening; the cries had stopped.

"Will?" He called back.

"Yeah?"

"You need to hide. *Now.*"

Will didn't even attempt to argue with the man. He did as he was told obediently, shuffling between a desk and a dresser.

Soon enough the cries had returned, static moans cracking in their ears. And they was no longer alone.

~oOo~

Will saw more than Maxwell ever could. Whether or not it was

because the Upside Down claimed his body and soul, Will could see something so obvious while the man was wandering around trying to find the noise. It was in the middle of the room. Light, ethereal outlines of two bodies occupied the space. A woman was held into the air by a man, choking her as gravity tried to weigh her down. Will could see the remaining arm of both bodies centered at her torso. He picked up on strange sounds: violent drippings, wet smacks, the greeting of a blade. Then a hoarse laugh echoed eerily.

“Was that supposed to hurt?” The woman’s voice was like radio static.

Will saw her push the man back, pulling something from her torso. She paused for a moment. Then out of nowhere, a ghostly blade flew through the air, landing in the man’s chest.